

Havant Borough Council Southleigh Masterplan Project

Introduction

Havant Borough Council were awarded a Neighbourhood Planning & Local Planning Capacity Building Fund to produce a masterplan for the Southleigh Strategic Site between the Denvilles and Emsworth areas of the Borough. This would build on evidence already available and use an intensive programme of workshops with the community and other stakeholders. The process was to genuinely engage the community in the place making of the site, while producing a realistic and deliverable plan for the site to inform development requirements. The work had to align with the objectives of this fund, i.e. to improve neighbourhood planning outcomes and to help deliver an up-to-date Local Plan.

The masterplanning would be undertaken alongside the evolving Local Plan Strategic site allocation to enable key elements of the process to be incorporated into the high level local plan policy for the site, as well as any further, more detailed work, such as a Supplementary Planning Document to guide the delivery of the site.

The rationale for this approach was that without public understanding and involvement in the planning of the Strategic Site, there was a high likelihood that the review of the Local Plan (and subsequent plan-led housing delivery of the sites) would be delayed and not achieved in a sustainable or cohesive manner. With early understanding, buy-in and influence the Council could help neighbourhoods (both those with official Neighbourhood Forum status and those without) to shape and be involved in plan preparation. This could significantly help support and speed up plan preparation.

Background

Havant Borough Council is progressing a new Local Plan: The Havant Borough Local Plan 2036, seeking to address the significant housing need identified for the area. Early in the process, in 2016, the Council identified the potential for site allocations for a number of urban extensions across the borough, as well as two strategic sites, one of which is the undeveloped land between Emsworth and Denvilles/Warblington. The potential development area could accommodate at least 1,650 dwellings, together with community facilities, green and other infrastructure.

A detailed masterplan was required in order to establish fully the development requirements of the site, building on work already undertaken. The master planning work would inform the content of the evolving Local Plan strategic site allocation, providing the detail to flesh out the principle of the allocation of the site

As the local plan was being produced to a tight timetable, rapid focused master planning and consultation were needed. The 'charrette', or community design workshop approach, an intensive planning session where residents, designers and others collaborate on a vision for development was considered to offer the unique advantage of giving immediate feedback to the designers. It also allows residents and community groups to be a mutual author of the masterplan, and in turn to influence the Local Plan.

Emsworth Neighbourhood Planning Forum were progressing a [Neighbourhood Plan for Emsworth](#) and the boundary of the Neighbourhood Plan Area included part of the Strategic Site. It is expected that the Forum, as well as the local Residents' Associations, would be full and active partners in the master planning process. Upon learning about the proposed Strategic Site Allocation, the Neighbourhood Forum had approached the Council about expanding their area to cover the site (only part of it lay in the Neighbourhood area as originally designated). The Council had rejected this proposal, as it would have been inappropriate for a Neighbourhood Forum to take on the planning for this strategically important site which could have potential impacts far beyond the neighbourhood area. The design workshop led Masterplan gave the Forum an alternative opportunity to participate in the future of this area.

Preparing the Masterplan: Design Workshop led process

Capacity Funding was used to appoint Levitt Bernstein, architects and master planners in Jan 2017 to produce a deliverable masterplan for the Strategic Site.

During February, intensive promotion of the master plan workshops to be held in March took place, targeting in particular known community groups as well as residents who had expressed an interest in or concern about the proposed Strategic site during previous consultation. In parallel, an online questionnaire about the future of the area was widely promoted, and gave initial sense to the team about key constraints and residents' views, and allows those to participate that would not wish to commit to the workshop sessions.

'Pre-charrettes' with officers and key partners (various departments of Havant Borough Council and Hampshire County Council, the Environment Agency etc) took place, to identify stakeholder data and views on site constraints, issues and opportunities.

Two workshops (afternoon and evening sessions) were held in March – the first to establish a vision, the second to review and refine options drafted by the master planners. Following the workshops, the design team refined options based on the second workshop and additional officer inputs, as well as undertaking viability testing. The resultant [Southleigh masterplan, together with a Consultation Summary and Viability Appraisal](#) were published in late 2017, alongside the [Regulation 18 Draft Havant Borough Local Plan](#).

Learning Points for community design workshop led master planning

- Targeted social media advertising works – HBC paid for a facebook campaign with radius around the site, and got a good response from this.
- Use existing contacts and networks in the community – Residents' Associations and the Neighbourhood Forum were very willing to spread the word in the community.
- Be absolutely clear that workshop sessions are not a forum for objections, but designed for positive engagement with the future of the site; HBC made this very clear in promoting the workshops, again when people signed up, and at the beginning of the workshop

sessions. While some negativity inevitably remained, generally there was engaged and positive participation in the sessions and a genuine desire to shape the development, rather than just object to it.

- Workshops can only engage a small number of people from the local community – at the Southleigh session had around 40 per session, with workshop tables of around 5 people, which worked well.
- An online questionnaire can be very effective in engaging those that would not be willing or able to commit to workshop sessions; It is worth spending time getting the questions right, if you want quality engagement.
- Workshops are extremely resource intensive, both in the preparation and on the day. – reckon on having 1-2 facilitators per table plus a few ‘floating’ helpers.
- A good venue in the community helps – the venue we booked had excellent staff which helped everything run smoothly.
- Workshops do genuinely give the opportunity for a two-way conversation, and for changing perceptions about development; feedback forms at the end of the workshop process indicated clearly that participants had a more positive view of the proposed development than before the workshops (the vast majority went from negative to neutral, remained neutral, or went from neutral to positive).
- Successful workshop led masterplanning depends on taking the opportunity to bring together a variety of council teams (Economic Development, Community, Environmental Health, marketing and communications) and public services, neighbouring planning authorities, utilities and the landowners and of course the local community, including the Neighbourhood Forum. This does not necessarily mean bringing these all together at one time, but all must feed into the process.
- Plan how to keep the community engaged in the period after any intensive engagement.
- Manage expectations. Engaging people in the workshops does raise expectations that their views will be accommodated. Comments during the Regulation 18 consultation on the Local Plan, during which the final Masterplan was published, reiterated a lot of the detailed points made during workshop sessions.

Conclusion

Workshop-led master planning is resource intensive, but area ultimately worth it to create positive engagement between diverse sets of stakeholders. They can be a tool with neighbourhood planning, or can be an alternative to it for certain areas or sites, which are of high local interest, but whose reach and importance lies beyond the scope of a neighbourhood plan. A major challenge for planning is to enable local communities to understand the considerations that go into the planning process, both in terms of the need to bring sites forward for development, but also the factors that shape the nature of a development. Early input in shaping a major development is an effective way of minimising major objections, and focussing communities on engaging in the shaping the future development instead.